

# Bones, bullets provide indication of Civil War battle

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bones, buttons and bullets uncovered at recently discovered graves near the Antietam battlefield in Western Maryland are providing new details about a pivotal Civil War battle that included the bloodiest day in American military history.

Researchers for the Smithsonian Institution and the U.S. National Park Service say the graves are of four members of the famed Irish Brigade from New York.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The four died Sept. 17, 1862, as wave after wave of Irish Brigade soldiers smashed against the Confederate line and were cut down by rifle fire on a day that saw 24,000 soldiers, Union and Confederate, fall in battle.

Examination of a shoulder blade and teeth found in one of the sites shows that a 45-year-old man helped lead the Union charge.

"This gentleman was in the front rank as the Irish brigade tried to dislodge the Confeder-

ate troops on that day," said Stephen Potter, an archaeologist for the U.S. National Park Service.

Potter said discovery of "buck and ball" ammunition indicates that the Irish Brigade was not well-armed for the battle it met that day.

The Irishmen, he said, were

carrying smooth-bore long

guns loaded to fire a marble-

sized ball and two buckshot

pellets.

"These were, in effect, com-

bat shotguns," he said, that

killed best at close range.

Based on the Confederate slugs that killed the 45-year-old New Yorker, said Potter, the rebels were using rifled long

guns that were lethal from

long distances. As a result, he

said, the Confederates were

able to kill the Union troops at

200 yards, long before the Yan-

kees could charge to within the

effective range of their weap-

ons.

The burial sites were found in April by three amateur ar-

chaeologists searching a field

near the boundaries of the federally owned battlefield near Hagerstown, Md. A team from the Smithsonian and the Park Service excavated the site and sifted tons of clay soil to find artifacts.

Dennis F. Frye, Park Serv-

ice historian, said the Battle of

Antietam, named after the

creek which flows through the

grounds, is considered by

many to be pivotal in the Civil War. Though it ended in a draw, Frye said the battle halted the South's first invasion of the North.